



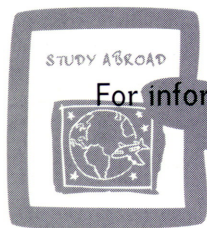


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# submissions

THE AUBURN CIRCLE accepts works from students, staff and alumni of Auburn University. Prose, poetry, essays and articles should be typed. THE AUBURN CIRCLE has access to IBM and Macintosh computers. It is preferred that artwork be submitted on slide, but originals are accepted. All original artwork remains in THE AUBURN CIRCLE offices and is photographed to reduce risk of damage (all artwork will be returned upon request). We accommodate artwork of any size and shape. Original copies of photographs are required for submission. Collections of related works by artists or photographers are accepted for our Gallery section. All submissions become property of THE AUBURN CIRCLE on a one-time printing basis, with reserved rights for possible reprinting of material at a later date.

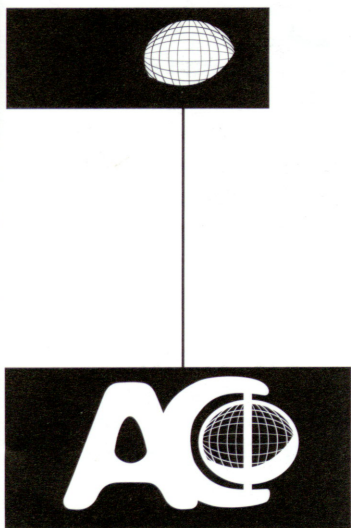
THE AUBURN CIRCLE is located in the Publications Suite, basement of Foy Union. For more information,

call 844-4122, or write:

THE AUBURN CIRCLE

Publications Suite, Foy Union Bldg.  
Auburn University, AL 36849

Please include your name, phone number, address, and a 3-5 sentence bio with submissions.



The staff of the AUBURN CIRCLE includes: The Editor formerly known as Carol Hartsell

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The Design assistant who formerly took baths known as Chris Neal

The Design Director "currently" known as...Torrence Webster Dot



THE AUBURN CIRCLE, financed by advertising and student activity fees, serves as a forum for writers and artists within the

university community. It aims to appeal to a diverse audience by providing a variety of short stories, poetry, art, and

photography. THE AUBURN CIRCLE is published three times a year - fall, winter, and spring - with an average distribution of

4,000 copies. The views expressed throughout the issue are those of the artists, not necessarily those of the Auburn

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# contributors:

**TRACY ANTON** is a contributing alum who doesn't do this full time.

**STEPHEN BANKHEAD** is a senior in Fine Art and is graduating this summer. He plans to continue his work and possibly continue his education in graduate school.

**DANIEL COZART** is a graduate student in English. He has published short fiction in *wind row*. When he isn't engaging in one the seven deadly sins, he is doing something less exciting.

**CHUCK EDWARDS** works in public relations for a community hospital in the Birmingham area. He graduated from Auburn in 1991 with a B.A. in Radio, Television, and Film and a double minor in English. He's a Pisces, enjoys moonlit strolls by the slag heap, and is looking for someone just like you. Call now! (Call him at work so his wife won't find out.)

**LEIGH HAFFNER** is a recent graduate from the School of Fine Arts. "It took eleven years, but I did it."

**ALAN HARMON** is a senior in Fine Art from Aiken, South Carolina. He is pursuing a degree in printmaking/painting.

**BETH E. HOWARD** is a junior in English. She recently talked herself out of her sixth speeding ticket.

**INGEBORG KRAUSE** is a graduate in Comparative Physiognomy. Besides reading and writing she enjoys spending time with her five cats and welding sculptures out of auto parts.

**LIBBY LYNN** goes to Auburn sometimes.

**JENNIFER OWENS** is a senior in Anthropology who is employed at Academic Services in the Athletic Department. She began working with photography in order to document her true hobby, which is traveling.

**ELAINE POSANKA** is a PhD candidate in the English department and a GTA of Great Books. Her poetry has also appeared recently in *Southern Humanities Review*.

**HEATHER PRESCOTT** is a recent graduate from the School of Fine Arts. She is moving to Pennsylvania to attend graduate school at Penn State. She is also getting married.

**JAMIE LEE SMALLWOOD** is a senior in English who enjoys writing and coloring her hair. She will graduate in August if she can pass MH160.

to the collective




# contents dot:

Liberty Dot  **DEER HUNTING**  
Beth E. Howard

**FATHER**  
Daniel Lozari  Jerry Lewis Dot

Frank Bruno Dot  **WHITE WINTER SKY**  
Jamie Lee Smallwood


K | K |  
Heather Prescott  Hitchcock Dot

Dada Dot  **SCARS IMPRESSED ON THE**  
flesh of life's feast  
Heather Prescott

**CONTENTMENT**  
from the confrontation series  
Leigh Haffner  Shakespeare Dot

Edvard Munch Dot  **JOURNEY-INNER SELF**  
from the confrontation series  
Leigh Haffner

**UNTITLED HAMBURGER**  
Stephen Bankhead  Untitled Dot

BatDot  **UNTITLED WAR WITH A SWAN**  
Stephen Bankhead

**UNTITLED BOX WITH FRAME**  
Stephen Bankhead  Warhol Dot

Prozac Dot  **SHOT RIDGE**  
Alan Harmon

**THE LESSER HURT**  
Tracy Anton  Wyatt Earp Dot

Confucius Dot  **UNTITLED**  
Jennifer Owens

**CHEMISTRY**  
Elaine Posanka  Morrissey Dot

Picasso Dot  **WHERE I'M FROM**  
Libby Lynn

**UNTITLED**  
Alan Harmon  Bram Stoker Dot

F.B.I. Dot  **PORTRAIT OF EMILY WITH A**  
can of peach halves  
Ingeborg Krause

**CHANCE MEETINGS**  
Chuck Edwards  Franken Dot

\* No dots were injured in the production of this magazine. Any resemblance to persons live, dead, real or fictitious is totally coincidental - and utterly amazing. Icons do not necessarily reflect the nature of the work it identifies. Thank you.



# EDITOR'S NOTE

This quarter

*The Auburn Circle* has one apology

to make and many thank-yous.

The apology goes to Conrad Ross for the upside-down printing of his collé, *China #4*.

The thank-yous go to everyone who has submitted, read, complimented, and otherwise supported this year's magazine. It is difficult to find an audience who will respond to a magazine that is constantly experimenting with its form, but based

on the response we have received, it seems that our efforts have been appreciated. However, I hope that the perpetual mini-controversy that is *The Auburn Circle* does not over-shadow the work that appears within it. The poetry, fiction, art, photography, and articles are

the reasons that this magazine exists. It is not here so that the editor and design director have something impressive to write on their resumé's, it is not here so that fellow members of the Fine Art and English departments can impress each other, and it is not here simply because all universities have literary/art journals. Auburn is a community comprising a diverse group of people, some of whom are painters, architects, poets, photographers, composers, quilters, or journalists. There are others who like to experience the work of these people. Within the realm of artistic activity there are readers as well as writers, viewers as well as visual artists, listeners as well as musicians. These groups interact with roles of equal importance, posing questions to each other. The medium for such dialogue can be a theatre, a radio, a gallery, a book. Sometimes it's *The Auburn Circle*.

I am proud to have been involved with this magazine for the past three years, and I want to thank the 1995/1996 staff for its hard work and cooperation. I also want to thank Alan Paris for convincing me to hire the artist formerly known as Torrence. He has done a wonderful job and I never want to work with him again.

I hope that we have adequately served the university community as a forum for writers and artists, and I hope that all of the readers/viewers are intrigued as I am by this issue's collection of work.

WITHIN THE REALM OF ARTISTIC ACTIVITY  
THERE ARE READERS AS WELL AS WRITERS,  
VIEWERS AS WELL AS VISUAL ARTISTS,  
LISTENERS AS WELL AS MUSICIANS.

## Deer Hunting

## Deer Hunting

The camouflage that I pull from my husband Harry's bottom drawer is faded and stained with blood from his previous conquests. One of those conquests, an eight-point buck, hangs over the mantle in our living room. His glass eyes follow me as I enter the room and lift a shotgun from Harry's gun rack. I weigh it in my hands, slide them up and down the barrel and remember the way it feels to pull a trigger and feel the kick of the gun against my shoulder.

Outside, I hear the *baripity-bip-bip* of the pickup as Harry cranks it. I wait a few minutes and hear the door of the house slam behind him.

"It's colder than a well digger's butt out there," he says and rubs his hands together. I saw the men who came to dig our well when I was a little girl. They stood next to a huge drill and stared



down a dark  
hole while  
sweat dripped  
down their  
backs and  
stained the  
underarms of  
their shirts. I  
don't think it  
would take  
much for some-  
thing to be cold-  
er than their  
butts. I was in  
the backyard,  
when they came  
that summer,  
with my .22  
aimed at alu-  
minum cans sit-  
ting on a  
sawhorse. I was  
eight years old  
and Daddy was  
teaching me to  
shoot so that he  
could take me  
deer hunting in  
the fall.

I hear  
Harry rambling  
through the  
kitchen drawers  
looking for dou-  
ble-aught shells  
and I remember  
the last time I  
went deer hunt-  
ing, the fall  
after I learned  
to shoot, twen-  
ty-three years

I wait a few *minutes*  
and hear the door  
of the house slam behind  
him.

a g o .  
D a d d y ' s  
hunting land  
was just over  
the Georgia-  
Alabama state  
line, fifteen miles  
from our house in  
Twin Forks Georgia.  
We left while it was  
still dark and reached  
his food plot, which was  
a clearing in the middle  
of a stand of pine and oak,  
just as the sun came up.  
There was a fog that morning  
and as I sat behind the bushes  
next to him, I could barely see  
across the clearing. We sat  
there for so long that my legs and  
my rear end went to sleep. There  
wasn't a sound that morning. I  
remember thinking that all the birds  
and squirrels were asleep and felt like  
telling Daddy that the deer were, too,  
when I heard a cracking sound on the  
other side of the clearing. He poked me  
and pointed. Across the clearing I could  
see the outline of a rack. I waited and in a

*It's colder than a well-digger's butt*

few minutes I saw the whole deer. It was the biggest buck I had ever seen, bigger than anything Daddy and his friends had ever shot. I waited for him to aim his gun, but he looked at me instead.

"All yours, 'Nita." He winked at me and my throat felt like I had swallowed a whole box of bullets. I couldn't breathe and even though it was freezing outside, I started to sweat. I couldn't believe he was giving this one to me. For a second I closed my eyes and thought of how he would point out the new rack hanging on our wall to his buddies and how his chest would poke out when he patted me on the back and said, "Anita bagged that one!" Then I opened my eyes and looked at the buck and all I saw was a deer

hanging by his hind legs from the tree in our backyard, his stomach slashed open and his guts spilling from the hole while blood dripped onto the ground and turned the dirt into lumpy brownish-red slime and I felt like all my insides were about to pour out of my throat and onto the dirt. I dropped my gun. The buck jumped and crashed into the briars that grew between the trees. Daddy didn't say much, but he never took me deer hunting again and I never asked to go until I decided to go with Harry twenty-three years later in hopes that I

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long and silent  
and tedious  
forever would be.





Thirteen years ago, when I was eighteen and he was twenty, I stood at the front of Twin Forks First Methodist church and promised Harry Clayton that I'd be with him until death did us part. I had just graduated from high school and had never dated anyone but Harry and I had no idea how long and silent and tedious for-  
ever would be. Mama read me a fairy tales when I was a little girl. Once upon a time, they all started. Once upon a time Harry and I were in love, but somewhere on the way to happily ever after we fell out. Harry works late at the body shop that his dad owns and when he does come home, we don't talk about anything important.

## I could save our marriage

I've wondered

if kids would help

could  
save  
our mar-  
riage.

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Conversation revolves around the bank where I work and the body shop and the gossip that invades every dinner table in Twin Forks. Who's having an affair, who's having a baby, who's getting a divorce. We never talk about Harry and Anita. I'm not even sure we know who they are anymore. I've wondered if kids would help, and we tried for a year or two but it didn't happen and it hasn't happened and even though I want a baby, neither Harry nor I have pushed the issue. I know that a child would need more than the two of us could

give him. Kids need to know that their parents love each other, and I'm not sure Harry and I do.

Harry watches me as I hold the gun.

"Baby, you need more on than that jacket." He throws a sweatshirt at me. I take off the jacket so that I can put the sweatshirt on beneath it and think that this is the closest I've come to taking off my husband's clothes in months. I wonder sometimes if Harry's sleeping with someone else, but I figure if he was, I'd know about it. Twin Forks isn't a big town. I think sometimes that Harry's the same way I am, that he just doesn't care about sex

## Harry watches

*me as I hold the gun.*

anymore. At least we have one thing in common.

Harry hunts on his grandad's land in Randolph County, about thirty minutes north of Twin Forks.

We don't talk much on the way. We have noth-

ing to say and even if we did, the muffler fell off the pickup last week and we couldn't hear each other anyway. We park the truck on a dirt road and walk about half a mile to Harry's tree stand. We sit with our backs against the tree and in about an hour Harry falls asleep. No wonder he hasn't bagged a deer in two years. I laugh at myself for thinking that deer hunting would be a bonding experience for the two of us. We're doing the same thing we've done for the past thirteen years, only now we're doing it in a tree during the coldest

*I want a deer, neither Harry or I have pointed the arrow. I know he still would want more than the two of us with your deer. He's not sure that these parents have not others, but I've not seen Harry and I. Harry watches me as I hold the gun.*

*"Maybe you want more on than that jacket." He is a sweatshirt at me. I take off the jacket so that I can put the sweatshirt on beneath it and think that this is the closest I've come to taking off my husband's clothes in months. I wonder sometimes if Harry's sleeping with someone else, but I figure if he was, I'd know about it. Twin Forks isn't a big town. I think sometimes that Harry's the same way I am, that he just doesn't care about sex*



December to  
hit South  
Georgia in ten  
years -  
Suddenly,  
there is a rus-  
tle in the  
underbrush  
beneath me.  
My heart starts  
pounding.  
There is some-  
thing frighten-  
ing about  
being alone in  
the woods and  
knowing that  
somewhere  
nearby there is  
another living  
thing that you  
can't see and  
wondering  
what it is and  
if it can see

## There is something frightening

*about being alone in the woods*

you and hoping that it's a squirrel or a deer and not a bobcat or a coyote. I look in the direction of the sound and against a background of oak and hickory I see a buck. I can tell from the way he stands that he can't see me and has no idea that I'm there and knowing this gives me a sense of power, of control. This, I think, is why men spend Saturdays and Sundays cramped in tiny tree stands in freezing weather. They want to feel, just for a minute or two, that they are in control. I stay as still as I can. I can see the hot puffs erupting from the deer's nostrils into the air. One, two, four, nine--a ten-pointer. He snorts and snuffles for food in the frost covered brown grass. This is it, I tell myself. Bag this one and Harry'll bust, he'll be so proud of you! I place the butt of the gun against my shoulder and train the sights on the buck.

He raises his head and looks  
straight toward me. I lift my eyes

from the sights. I think for a  
moment that I'm going to  
lose him and feel a wave

of relief, but he does-  
n't run. He keeps  
looking at me,  
for a

moment,  
then two, and  
then he looks at  
Harry sleeping in the  
stand next to me. He

looks back to me and drops  
his head. He doesn't eat any-  
more, but stands there with his head  
hung, his body tensed as though he is  
waiting for my shot. For a minute, I am as

*There is something frightening about being alone in the woods and knowing that*

*somebody nearby there is another living thing that you can't see and wondering*  
*what it is and if it can see you and hoping that it's a squirrel or a deer and not a*  
*bobcat or a coyote. I look in the direction of the sound and against a background*  
*of oak and hickory I see a buck. I can tell from the way he stands that he can't*  
*see me the hot puffs erupting from the deer's nostrils into the air. One, two, four,*

*nine. This is it, I tell myself. Bag this one and Harry'll bust, he'll be so proud*  
*of you! I place the butt of the gun against my shoulder and train the sights on*  
*the buck.*

paralyzed as the buck seems to be. I swallow hard and putting my eye back to the sights, I put my finger on the trigger.

*You seen any deer yet*

"Go ahead," I tell myself, "do it." I imagine the buck hanging by his hind legs from the tree Harry and his friends use to dress deer. I see Harry taking the knife and slicing the deer's stomach and I can hear the blood dripping onto the dirt. I see the head and the rack hanging over the mantle and I feel his blank glass eyes following me as I walk through the room. I feel the vomit rising in my throat and for a moment I am eight years old again. Harry stirs beside me and I take my finger off the trigger and cough. The buck crashes into the undergrowth but the noise doesn't wake Harry, who is still sleeping next to me. I reach out and run my fingers over his head.

"I couldn't do it, Harry," I whisper. "I couldn't." He opens his eyes and looks at me, then yawns and coughs.

**I think**

about the buck and the guns and the camouflage before and the fact that Harry and I haven't had sex in four months and that I can't remember the last time he told me he loved me and I know that shooting that buck wouldn't have made any difference at all. I lean over and kiss Harry on the mouth. He looks confused and I smile.

"You seen any deer yet, 'Nita?" I think about the buck and the guns and the camouflage and the meaningless conversation at the dinner table the night before and the fact that Harry and I haven't had sex in four months and that I can't remember the last time he told me he loved me and I know that shooting that buck wouldn't have made any difference at all. I lean over and kiss Harry on the mouth. He looks confused and I smile.

**'Nita?**

"Not a one," I say.

*The End*



# Father

## Father

Remembering  
summers  
hot and brown  
on blankets  
ragged and scratchy  
for skin dark  
with days  
half-naked.

Dr. Pepper fizz  
round peanuts,  
losing grease  
and salt  
in ice— and in  
the refrigerator,  
Star Wars figures  
freeze and  
as I watch  
the dogs  
in the sandbox  
I wanted for a  
swimming pool,  
you laugh

at him  
and it is  
as if—  
we are all  
happy,  
You with a husband,  
Me with a father,  
and  
“We Are.”

Daniel Cozart

## White Winter Sky

Gwen Albright Reed

sat straight up in the bed, her husband still sleeping beside her. Even though it was June, a cold breeze was coming through the window that she had left cracked. The very first thought she had was, *Why did I have a dream about Joe Mayfield?*

The last time she had seen him had been fifteen years ago; she was in the fifth grade then. She remembered how Joe had beaten up Stevie Matthews for making fun of his "flood pants". Joe had bloodied Stevie's nose while they were waiting for the school bus. She remembered the drops of blood spattering on the gravel and how Stevie just stood there with his mouth open, purposely letting the blood fall to make it look as bad as he could. Joe didn't get in trouble; even Mr. Hall, the principal, seemed glad to see Stevie get what had been coming to him.

Joe's clothes never seemed to fit right; most of them were hand-me-downs, from his two older brothers. Gwen, like the rest of her classmates, knew that Joe was different from them. The people in Ryan County were not wealthy, most made their living from the farms they owned. Joe's family made their living by working for those people.

But in the dream, Joe didn't have on the baggy shirts and faded jeans that had been too short. In the dream he had been older, maybe seventeen, and he had kissed Gwen, long and hard on the mouth, never saying a word. When Gwen opened her eyes, he was gone.

Gwen wasn't able to go back to sleep. She lifted the thick patchwork quilt, a wedding gift from her mother-in-law, from her thin tan legs, and stepped down on to the hard wood. The floor, like the dream, sent sharp chills through her naked body. "What's wrong, honey?" her husband Ben asked, still half asleep. "Nothing, I

*The people in Ryan County were not wealthy,* most made their living from the farms they owned. **Joe's** family made their living by working for those people.

just had.....I just can't sleep," she whispered, not knowing how to answer his question. She wasn't trying to hide the dream from him; she honestly did not know what to say. As she pulled the cotton robe over her head, she saw the red digital numbers glow a bright "2:30" through the pale blue fabric. In only four more hours, she would hear the splash of water in the bathroom as Ben got ready for work. He was a landscaper. She was a teacher at East Side Elementary. They had lived in the small town where he grew up, Haleyville, Alabama, not far from Ryan County, where she had been raised. They had been married for only six months. *Joe is dead. So why was I dreaming about him?* she thought.

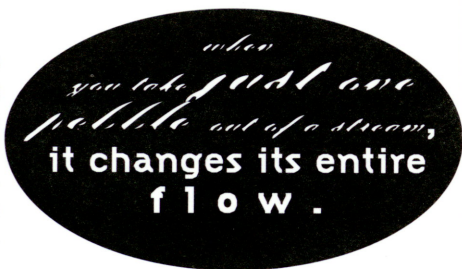
She lightly closed the bedroom door and felt her way into the kitchen. She opened the refrigerator and took out the glass pitcher of milk. She poured a wine glass full; she always drank her milk from a wine glass, it seemed to make it taste better. She was still thinking so hard about the dream that the glass overflowed, leaving a white puddle on the black tile counter. She didn't bother with cleaning it up. What it made her think of was how Joe would trade with everyone in the lunch room until he wound up with three,



sometimes four cartons of milk. She stood there in the kitchen until she was back again in Mrs. Bowling's fifth grade classroom.

"The last thing I want to add about our science lesson is.....that when you take just *one* pebble out of a stream, it changes its entire flow." Mrs. Bowling put the chalk down and dusted off her bright flower print skirt. "Alright class, you can put your books away now. But before the bell rings we need to draw names for the Christmas party. It's going to be in one week from today. You need to take one of the folded pieces of paper out of the basket. The name that's on the paper is who you need to have a gift for." What Gwen had felt for Mrs. Bowling was what children often did when they're in the fifth grade, as if the teacher were magical, like she didn't exist outside of the classroom. Gwen had loved her because she played kickball with them at recess - even when she had on three inch heels, the unusual way she dressed, talked, and how she smelled like chalk mixed with perfume.

Gwen and her best friend Maggie White had desperately wanted each other's name. They had already planned what they would get each other, identical Malibu Barbies. As the basket was passed down the rows, Mrs. Bowling reminded them of their sci-



ence lesson, "See everybody, if one of you were missing, the basket could not be passed, just like the pebble that is removed from the stream. It would change everything." Gwen watched each expression on her classmates faces. By that alone, she could tell that Thomas Talley had gotten Ellen Bromburg's name, that Jason Morgan had gotten Stevie Matthew's name, and that Maggie had not drawn her name. When the basket was handed to Gwen, there were only two pieces of paper left. She debated over which one to pick; she chose the smaller one thinking that "Maggie White" would not take up much space. She slowly opened it, careful not to tear the paper; which said "Joe Mayfield". Joe, who sat behind her grabbed for the basket, "What's the hold up, Granny?" he asked her. "You gonna let me draw or not?"

Gwen waited for him to open his paper.

Joe, who sat behind her  
grabbed for the basket,  
"What's the hold up,  
G r a n n y ? "

Then, what she prayed would not happen, did.

"Hey! Gwennie, I got your name" he said. Gwen would have to swap with Joe. She wouldn't get a Malibu Barbie now. *I will be lucky to get anything at all*, she thought.

The bell rang and all of the kids went running for the door, as if the classroom were on fire. Maggie waited for Gwen at the door. "Who's name did you get?" Maggie asked.

"Oh, um, I got Joe Mayfield's name."

"Who got your name?" Maggie asked.

"Joe did." Gwen answered low and matter-of-factly, so that it did not seem like she cared. But she did; it was if she and Joe were connected now.

Gwen and Maggie did

not speak again until they found their places on the bus. They sat in the middle, not in the

The bell rang and all of the kids

went running for the door

Who's name did you get?

back with the boys who made farting noises, and not too close to the front where Ellen Bromburg was playing her clarinet for Mr. Moon, the bus driver.

"Well, I think Joe is kind of cute," Maggie said. "He always calls me 'Waggy Maggie'. I asked him why he did that once and you know what he said? He said that I looked cute when I walked in front of him to the lunchroom, that I shook my butt a little." Maggie covered her mouth and giggled. "The only thing is, Gwen, his family's so poor, he probably won't get you anything good. I mean I like Joe, but I could never 'like' him."

The bus was getting closer to Maggie's house, she was the first to get off the bus and the last stop in the mornings, a bus schedule that Gwen envied. "Maggie I got his name. He got mine. That doesn't mean that we are married. It doesn't mean anything except I have to buy him a stupid present." Her voice was getting louder. Maggie turned away from Gwen and began walking to the front of the bus.

Gwen watched out the window as Maggie's mother held the door open for her to come inside. Maggie's house reminded Gwen of one that you might see on a television show, when the camera flashes on the screen for just a second; so that you can get a feel for where the characters live and what kind of people

they are. Maggie's house would have said that her family was kind of 'plastic,' Gwen thought as she looked at the mint green vinyl siding and the grass that looked like a golf course. Mrs. White waved to the school bus; Maggie never looked back. Gwen felt terrible. She was mad because Maggie had acted like such a snob. She was mad because she had thought the same things about Joe.

Gwen looked down at her watch, it was 3:15. She had another thirty minutes to go before it was her turn to get off the bus. As Mr. Moon steered the big yellow vehicle around the curvy county roads, Gwen stared hard out at the gravel. She let her head rest against the window, not caring that it was being jarred against the cold glass, not caring that Ellen was playing "Silent Night" for the twelfth time since they got on the bus. She just sat there, wondering how she could think such mean, selfish things about Joe.

It was his turn to get off. "See you tomorrow, Gwen," he said. "Be thinking of what you want for your Christmas present." He turned

around to the back of the bus and shot his final spit-wad.

Gwen admired his aim that hit Stevie Matthews right on the forehead. "O.K. You do the same. I'm not sure what boys like!"

"I'm sure as hell not sure what girls like!"

"Joe Mayfield! If I ever hear you talk like that again on my bus, I'll tan your hide myself!" Mr. Moon shouted.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Sir, but I didn't think you could hear me over Ellen's clarinet." Joe turned back around and winked at Gwen.

Mr. Moon said, "Have a good weekend, Joe. Be out here on time Monday mornin', if you're not I'm gonna drive right on by."

"Bye, Gwen! See you Mondayyyy!" Joe yelled as he stood in the dirt driveway that led to his mobile home. Gwen watched

*Gwen*  
admired his aim that  
hit Stevie Matthews

"I'm sure as hell not  
sure what girls like!"

"Joe Mayfield!

If I ever hear you talk  
like that again on my  
bus, I'll tan your hide  
m y s e l f . "



him  
as he  
took off running wild and recklessly toward the trailer. She wished that she could run like that, as if the wind were about to lift your feet off the ground and pick you up into the white winter sky.

"Bye, Joe," she whispered so quietly that her words left a steamy print on the window. That was the last time she ever saw him.

Joe lived on highway 67, in front of Ryan Baptist Church, with his mother, father, and two older brothers. It was set just above Bev Miller's farm and the house that she lived in all her entire fifty-four years.

Two chicken houses had been built that summer, still so new that their tin roofs were blinding underneath the afternoon sun. Bev had never married; she bought the chicken houses with money her father had left when he died. All the people at the baptist church thought that she was a lesbian; Gwen wasn't sure what that was but she imagined, since the church took Bev's donations every Sunday, that it must not have mattered anyway.

Joe's father worked for Bev and the church. He was in charge of everything that went on at the two chicken houses, from feeding to picking up the ones that died

Bev had married

some-  
times.

Today, like every other Friday, he would mow the grassy acre that was in front of the church. Sometimes he let Joe help by picking up litter and pulling the weeds that grew beside the wrought iron "Ryan Baptist Church" sign next to the highway.

That was how Joe was killed, sitting too close to the highway, looking over at Bev's chicken houses. His father was mowing the grass on the John Deere tractor, so close to Joe he must not have heard the truck coming. Joe was so small hunched down on his knees that the driver didn't see him.

Gwen didn't find out until Saturday morning when she went with her mother to Nelson's General Store, to buy laundry detergent, the kind that made her clothes smell like Mrs. Bowling's. Nobody had to tell her; she saw the cigar box with a sign taped to the top that read, "Flower Donations for Joseph Mayfield."

**SHE BOUGHT  
the chicken  
houses  
with the  
money her  
father had  
left when  
he died.**

She  
looked  
up into Mr.  
Nelson's wrinkled  
brown eyes. "That's so bad  
about the little Mayfield boy," he  
said to Gwen's mother. "I feel so sorry  
for his daddy. He was right there when it  
happened." Mr. Nelson was short and skinny;  
*he looks like a weasel*, Gwen thought, as she  
stood in front of the counter, getting sick to  
her stomach from the smell of his Juicy Fruit  
that he never stopped smacking, and the  
words that kept coming from his mouth.

She ran out of the store and got into  
the car her mother had left running so it  
would stay warm. *No. No. No. No. This is not  
really happening*, she thought. But she was  
stuck. No waking up or closing the book, like  
when she had a nightmare or got scared from  
reading "true crime" books that she would  
sneak out of her father's study. This was real-  
ly happening. It was out of her hands now,  
that was her mother's expression. Gwen felt  
that everything seemed to be when you're  
eleven.

Her mother opened the back  
seat, put the groceries in, tears  
welling up in her eyes.  
Gwen remembered the  
times she had seen  
her mother  
cry, once  
when

she sliced her thumb  
while peeling potatoes,  
the other when Gwen  
had fallen off the mon-  
key bars at school and  
had to go to the emer-  
gency room. *Mothers  
are not supposed to cry.  
When mothers cry it  
means that things are  
really bad*, Gwen  
thought. When they got  
home Gwen's mother  
grabbed her, as if she  
were catching her from  
falling off a cliff or  
keeping her away from  
a fire. They stood  
embraced on the front  
porch for what seemed  
to Gwen like hours. The  
December wind picking  
up leaves for a short fast  
dance. The sky was grey  
and lifeless. But Gwen  
couldn't see anything,  
she pressed herself so  
tight against her moth-  
er's blue wool sweater,  
it was as if she wanted  
to go back inside her. A

No. No. *No.* No.

This is not really happening

## IT WAS TWILIGHT AND DEW WAS ON THE GROUND

place where there are no boys, highways, trucks, no Christmas, no death.

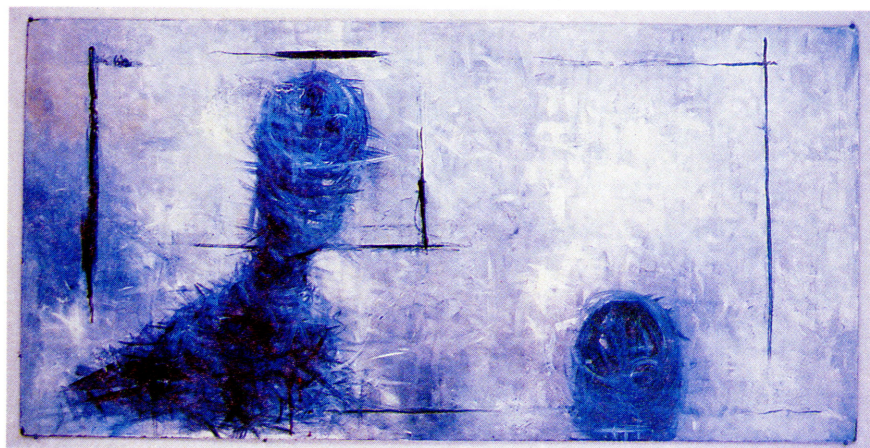
It was five-thirty a.m. now. Gwen had moved out on to the screened in porch, sitting on the wicker couch that had been bought at a flea-market. She

could see through the front porch screen that it was twilight and dew was on the ground. The morning glories were beginning to open up, like babies stretching their mouths to yawn or cry. She walked back into the kitchen, noticing the milk that she had not cleaned up earlier. She wiped it up with the sleeve of her robe, letting it soak into the cotton. When she opened the door into the bedroom, she could hear Ben's deep, reassuring breaths. She remembered the box under their bed where she had saved things from her childhood. All of her yearbooks were in there. She was careful not to make much noise as she pulled

the cardboard box from underneath the dust ruffle. As she took the lid off, she was almost afraid of seeing the picture of Joe. The red copy of *Ryan Elementary 1981* seemed so much smaller than it used to. She opened it and turned to the page where her fifth grade class was. There was Maggie White, whom she had not seen since high school; Stevie Matthews, who had taken over Nelson's General Store, Ellen Bromburg, who was now music teacher at Ryan Elementary. Joe was not on the same page with the rest of her class, he was on the one beside it. It was a whole page with an 8x10 picture below the words, "In Loving Memory of Joseph Mayfield 1970-1981". She looked hard into Joe's eleven-year-old eyes, they were the same way she had seen them in the dream - bright and goldish-brown. She ran her finger across the page; she had the same feeling as when she looked at pictures of her relatives who were dead: *it's strange how they seem to be looking back at you*, she thought.

She closed the book and put it in the box. She pushed everything back under the bed. She took off the robe and let it fall down on the floor. She slid into the bed and pushed her body against Ben's. She closed her eyes and fell back to sleep. She began to dream again of Joe. This time they were eleven, running together, more like kites than children.





Kiki,  
oil on board Heather Prescott



**Scars Impressed on the Flesh of Life's Feast,**  
oil on board   Heather Prescott



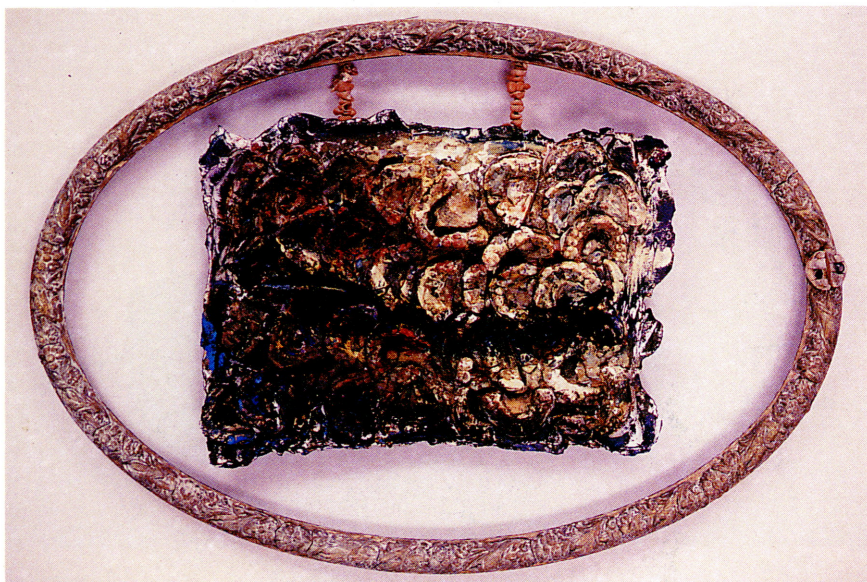


**Contentment (from Confrontation Series),**  
acrylic, vines, paper, string, wire, rice, sand. 63"x68"x15"  
Leigh Haffner

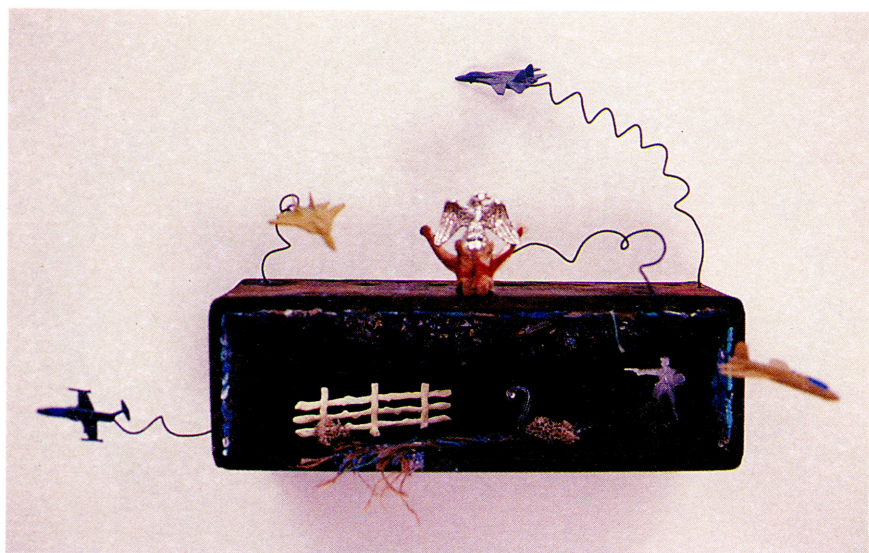




**Journey - Inner Self (from Confrontation Series),**  
acrylic, vines, paper, string, wire, sand. 63"x68"x15"  
Leigh Haffner

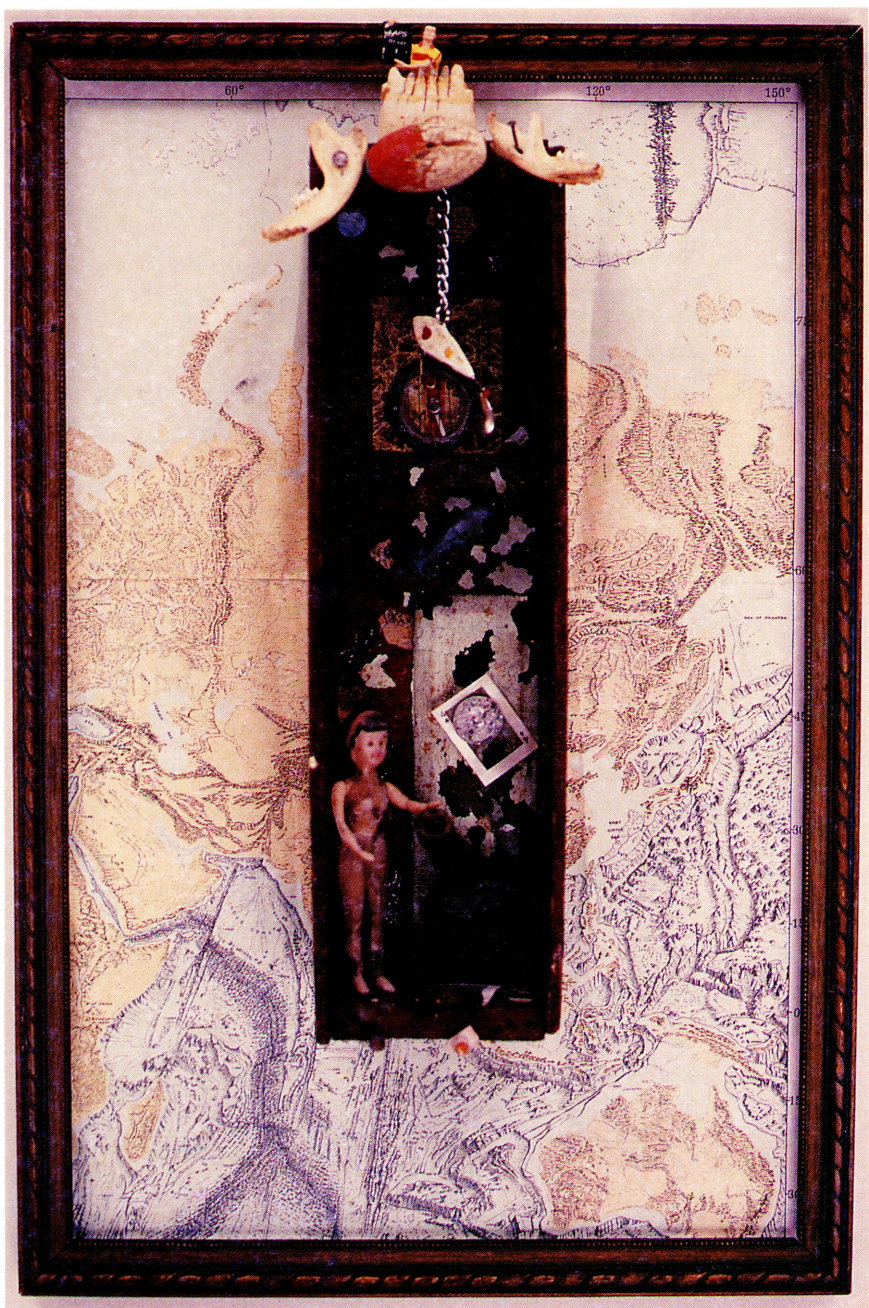


**Untitled Hamburger,**  
mixed media assemblage Stephen Bankhead



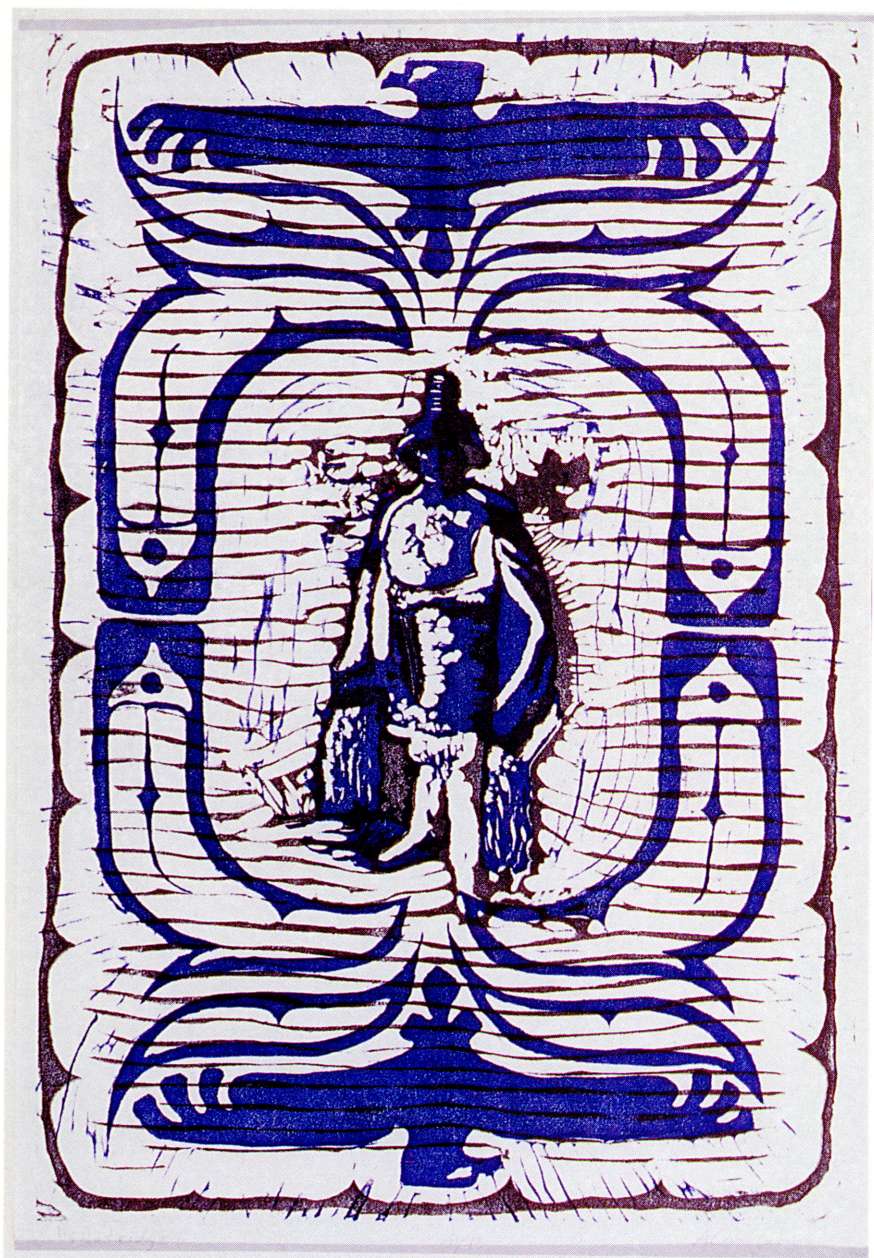
Untitled War with a Swan,  
mixed media assemblage Stephen Bankhead





Untitled Box with Frame,  
mixed media assemblage Stephen Bankhead





Shot Ridge,  
linoleum print Alan Harmon

# The lesser hurt

Tracy Anton

He was the best looking man I had ever seen—  
I was sleeping nearest the window.  
He came to pick me up—  
The bed is a safe place.  
A little late—  
I was too warm.  
But I had given him the wrong directions—  
I didn't really mind.  
And he wound up at the wrong dorm—  
With just a thin blue sheet covering me,  
He was very sweet about it, and he was dressed so handsomely standing in the lobby—  
How could I be hot?  
Took me to dinner, I had a couple glasses of blush, he a few glasses of red—  
Gradually, something woke me.  
He kissed me in the parking lot against his car in front of the restaurant's plate glass window—  
Pressure on my legs, and then on my right arm  
We were supposed to rent a movie, *Singles*, I think—  
His weight  
But his card was at the apartment—  
On top of me  
We went back—  
Making it difficult to breathe.  
And we didn't leave—  
Why was I here?  
I hit the light switch next to the door—  
What should I do?  
He found the hook to my dress, unzipped it slowly—  
If I say the word,  
I felt so real this night, every taste was stronger, every thought more enlightened—  
And he doesn't comply,  
I thought myself whole—  
That makes it real.  
His equal—  
And this shouldn't be real.  
I was a woman to him—  
So I stared at the corner  
Not just eighteen—  
and noted the intricacies of the grain in the molding.  
When he drove me home in the morning,  
And I thought of the word over and over and then  
I pretended I never knew.





Untitled  
Jennifer Owens



# Chemistry

## Chemistry

Hydrogen,  
Lithium, I forget the  
mass, order. Chaos  
elements didn't rhyme. My leaden interest found no mnemonic devices in  
lab drawers among Bunsen burners, tongs to hold test tubes, and bottle  
labels half burnt by their contents or high school fingers' hot searching.  
I failed

Chemistry that quarter. The teacher never  
suspected I was in love with her husband.

Elaine Posanka

## where i'm from

Libby Lynn

### where i'm from

the edges of the wooded path are safe from the city.

this way recalls the aspen mountains half a continent away, where the roots  
of both tree and family run deep as guilt.

i trace the edges of the road beneath that carries me from town to house, this short cut  
through the trees.

you - the collective strength that came from being born into a group of seven -

see through my eyes the little things that i admire because of where i'm from,  
the dead shack, slanted by the wind, the vines that come to life again,  
the birds on the bed of dirt and all the litter in the corners of the wood.

you smile through my lips and sing with my hands and hold me  
past the bridges that connect the earth to heaven.

you, my sisters, my lover, kiss me

with my insides and collect dried bones and bottles, clearing the road  
of glass and the dead.

my father, my brothers, you hang me

by my ankles and turn the pebbles in my boots

over and backwards with laughter and madness, the things from which we were made.

my mother, you trace the edges of your belly with a hand  
that holds my hand in mine; this land is secretly well traveled  
and worn down to the water from the rains.

you, the daughter, remember

how laughing and going mad grow larger in numbers.





Untitled,  
linoleum print     Alan Harmon

## Portrait of Emily With a Can of Peach Halves

Her knees tucked under her chin, she is telling me  
names of trees. She is a child  
with skeptical eyes. She is plying  
peach halves with a plastic spoon.

When she lies in the tent learning the patterns  
of leaves on canvas, she hears the river,  
the fire voices. All vacation,  
she has been reading a book about horses

mostly by flashlit half-light: manes  
in the spray of an unseen ocean, her eyes  
open to moonlit slits like the place where  
door flaps separate, light bleeds in.

Emily counts these days and dreams  
in dun and bay and palomino,  
all of which she can distinguish:  
shanks from withers,  
forms from natures,  
variables from verities.

Portrait of Emily  
With a Can of Peach Halves

Ingeborg Krause

## CHANCE MEETINGS

Highway 263 is a winding, often narrow road to nowhere running through back woods and between empty fields, missing all the bigger cities and major

attractions on its route from North Georgia to South Alabama. Long neglected, having been forsaken for the convenience of freeway travel, what's left of the pavement is riddled with cracks and pots; dangerous curves lie in wait at the bottom of steep hills with the signs that once warned of their presence hanging on various frat house walls all across the state. Most

the homes and shops that can be spotted along the road side stand about as sturdy as a house of cards; unkept and abandoned, they're now nothing more than motels for insects, woodland creatures, and occasionally a vagrant or two, just passing thru.

There are certain stretches where on cloudy nights the darkness is so complete it seems if you were to cut

CHANCE MEETINGS



y o u r  
h e a d -  
l i g h t s i t  
w o u l d  
w r a p  
a r o u n d  
y o u , g r a b  
t i g h t , a n d  
s t o p y o u  
d e a d . I t  
w a s o n  
o n e o f  
t h e s e  
p a r t s o f  
U . S . 2 6 3 ,  
o n j u s t  
s u c h a  
n i g h t ,  
s o m e -  
w h e r e  
b e t w e e n  
h e r e a n d  
t h e r e ,  
t h a t a  
m e t a l l i c  
c l u n k a n d  
r u m b l e  
d i s t u r b e d  
t h e n a t u r -  
a l s o u n d s  
o f t h e  
n i g h t . A  
g r e e n  
C h e v y  
p i c k - u p  
t r u c k ,  
u n i n t e n -  
t i o n a l l y  
d e c o r a t e d  
w i t h g r e a t  
p a t c h e s o f  
r u s t , t r a v -  
e l e d  
s o u t h .

The driver  
was a big,  
b e e f y  
m a n ,

whose hairline  
had said its final  
farewell long ago. The cab of  
the truck was filled with smoke  
coming from the cigar packed tight  
into one corner of his mouth. He  
rubbed the moisture from his red-  
dening eyes, started to roll down the  
window for the seventh time, and, for  
the seventh time, rolled it right back  
up when the first hot and humid tenta-  
cle of southern summer air reached  
through the window and slapped him  
across the face. The asthmatic breath of  
the truck's half-assed air conditioner was  
no match for its intensity.

"Sombitch," he said under his  
breath,

He was far too pissed off to not be  
smoking, but damn if it wasn't getting thick  
in there. Too hot to open a window, too  
angry not to smoke. Rock and a hard place.  
Just one more thing that couldn't be con-  
trolled. You just had to live with it.

The truck found another bump in the  
road or perhaps an animal. He adjusted the  
rearview mirror in order to check the baggage he was  
carrying. The large plastic sack was rolling back and  
forth having been set in motion by the bump/animal the  
truck had hit. Its bulk and awkward shape caused it to  
move without rhythm or balance like someone who has  
drunk more beer than their body agreed to. With a thud  
the sack came to rest against one side of the truck bed.

"You sombitch," the driver said, his words rid-  
ing on a thick plume of cigar smoke. "You. Son. Of. A.  
Bitch!" He took the cigar from his mouth, spat in the  
floor of the passenger's seat, wiped away some brown  
saliva which had trickled down his chin, and replaced

A green  
 *Chevy*   
pick-up truck

He was far too pissed off to not be smoking, but damn if it wasn't getting thick in there.

the cigar.

In the distance, just at the outskirts of his headlight's vision, the driver of the old green truck thought he saw something dart across the road, moving from the left shoulder to the right. At first there was no way to tell what it might have been, and he really didn't care for that matter, but as he drove on he found the culprit was still there standing along side the road with a crooked thumb jutting out from the end of a bony arm like a flesh covered hook ready to snag hold of the truck as it went by. The arm was connected to a young, gangly boy, maybe eighteen, nineteen. Dressed smartly if not expensively (a blue oxford shirt with the sleeves rolled half way up, an argyle sweater tied around his neck prep school like, faded jeans, and brown hair combed back with some type of grease or gel giving it the appearance of polished leather), the boy

maybe eighteen, nineteen.

## THE ARM WAS CONNECTED TO A YOUNG, **GANGLY BOY**

looked hell and gone from his element down here, deep in the bowels of the South.

As he drew closer to the poor lost soul the driver began easing on the breaks.

"Why not?" he thought out loud. After all he was still angrier than an unfed pitbull. A hitchhiker might help to improve his mood. At the very least it couldn't make things any worse. Nope, nothing to lose.

When the truck came to a stop the boy jumped in, all smiles and thank you's. He got in the truck so quickly, in fact that he didn't notice the grease caked tire iron or the hefty sized romance novel with sultry pink lettering on its cover and frayed corners which were lying in the passenger's seat. He just plopped his ass right down on both without a complaint.

"Thank God," he said, "I was afraid I was going to be out here all night." His voice was polished and clear as light, untainted by accent, giving no hint of his origins. But they for damn sure weren't around here.

The driver put the truck into gear, and started off again.

"You was on the wrong side," the driver said.

"I'm sorry?"

"I saw you run across the road. You shoulda been on this side in the first

place, in the direction you was goin'."

"Actually, I was originally intending to go the other way. But your's is the first car I've seen in..." he looked at the flashy silver watch on his left wrist, "more than three hours. Frankly, I don't care what direction I travel now, just as long as it takes me out of here."

"Must not be goin' anywhere important, huh."

There was a moment of silence as the driver pulled the truck in gear over the protests of the transmission, they were off. Then...

"Superman with the sweater," the driver mumbled to himself.

"What was that?"

"Oh, yeah," the boy said, fingering the knotted sleeves beneath his chin. "My mother dressed me this morning."

"Really," the driver said chuckling.

"Oh hell," the boy said rubbing his eyes.

He then reached one hand around behind his back as if he were going for his wallet or perhaps to pull that book out of his ass. "I apologize, but I'm exhausted. I really don't think I can go through the whole...routine this evening." With that he brought his arm back around. In his hand he held not his wallet or the novel, but a hunting knife with a six inch blade; sharp as lightning on one edge, serrated on the other, and painted black so as not to reflect light which would catch the eye and draw attention to it. "Could you just pull over please."

For a moment the driver watched the boy out of the corner of his eye as he continued to drive without slowing, his round face blank, expressing nothing. Then slowly, he pulled the cigar from his meaty lips as they parted into a grin. And from that smiling mouth came a

deep, sickly laugh born from diseased lungs and edged with phlegm.

"I hardly see what could be humorous. I guarantee you this is no

joke." The boy growled as he spoke, quite visibly becoming angry over the driver's apparent lack of fear.

The older man just seemed to laugh harder, his mouth stretched open so wide it was supported by four chins as opposed to the original two, and was at work constructing a fifth. Tremors ran across his body so violently you'd have thought he was sitting smack dab on the business end of a jackhammer.

"What's so fucking funny!" the boy screamed as he moved on the driver with surprising speed for

I really don't  
think I can go  
*through*  
*the whole...*  
routine this  
evening.

With that he brought his arm back around. In his hand he held not his wallet or the novel, but a hunting knife with a six inch blade, sharp as lightning on one edge, serrated on the other, and painted black so as not to reflect light which would catch the eye and draw attention to it.



someone who looked as though he'd blow away in a strong breeze. He put the knife's finely honed edge to the driver's throat. It nestled itself between chins two and three.

"Oh lordy me," the driver sighed as his laughter abated. "You're the Marauder, right? The Roadside Marauder?"

The boy's face twitched at the mention of the name. After a moment, "That's what the newspapers say."

"Well, Marauder, take yourself a look there in the glove box. I think you might get a laugh yourself."

For a time there was silence.

"Go on," the driver finally said. "This ain't no trick. Nothin' to worry about. Just want you to see what I find so funny."

Carefully, with sharp eyes covering the driver's every movement, the Marauder eased back into his seat sliding the black steel gently across the other man's neck.

"Alright, I'll play along, big man," the Marauder said with a smile, a wave of calm replacing the rage that had surfaced only a moment before. "But don't get wise. You're no hero. And I'm not the push over you might think."

"Okee dokee," the driver said, raising his hands for a moment in mock surrender.

As he opened the glove box, a wad of newspaper clippings packed in too tightly came spilling into the Marauder's lap. In the pile certain words in large print, part of the headlines, caught his eye. "Murder", "Bloody", and "7th Vicitm" among them.

"Not those," the driver said. "The case. In the back."

With his right hand, the Marauder raked the remaining clippings from the glove box uncovering a small, black leather case. Silver zipper teeth ran around three fourths of the case's perimeter, clenched tight together, holding it closed. As the case was opened, the weak light emanating from the dash board caught hold of the contents and reflected off, giving them a hazy green glow like emeralds in the moonlight. The Marauder was transfixed by what he gazed upon. He looked back to the news clippings scattered in his lap and on the floor, then again at what lie inside the case; two polished scalpels, one with an edge about two inches in length, and snuggled close by in the gray velvet lining, a little brother of about average size.

"Well I'll be a son of . . ." The Marauder's words trickled off. He turned his eyes to the pudgy, smiling face of the driver. "You're the Surgeon!" he said, smiling with excitement. "I'll be a son of a goddamn bitch if

**Oh my God, this is unbelievable. You're . . . well, I mean . . . you're a legend!**

Ten

papers give me."

"Absolutely! Altogether, including your latest, you've been known to the world as seven different killers since the

Ripper murders. And that was your third, you say? Which means

you're on your ninth spree."

"That's amazing. I'm truly impressed. And a little touched to be quite honest," the Surgeon said.

"Well, what can I say--you're my role model. You know I used to read hundreds of newspapers, from all over the country, after one of your killing sprees would *mysteriously end* trying to find out where you had gone. It amazed me. You would just drop out of sight one place, then turn up as a totally different person a thousand miles away."

"One thing's for sure, it takes discipline. You got to know when to move on, and do it. No matter how well things seem to be going." The Surgeon paused as if in deep concentration, then, "Say, you want me to tell you the best way to leave one spree and move on to the next?"

"Are you serious? I'd love to know." The Marauder focused fully on the Surgeon, anxiously awaiting the forthcoming

knowledge as if he were an apostle about to receive the Holy Ghost.

you're not the Night Surgeon!"

"That's what they're callin' me these days," he said with a laugh.

"Oh my God, this is unbelievable. You're . . . well, I mean . . . you're a legend! One of my heroes!" The Marauder was absolutely bubbling. His thoughts, which only moments before had seen only the desire for murder on the road ahead, had now fishtailed, done a donut, and changed direction altogether moving towards a giddy, teen idol-like fascination.

"How do you figure me a legend?" the Surgeon asked, seeming a little embarrassed.

"Oh, now don't play modest with me. I've been a fan of yours since back when they were calling you the Midnight Ripper."

"Really! Wow, you must only been about eight or nine."

"Ten."

"Man. That was my third spree, ya know. And you been keepin' up with me since back then--through all the different sprees and names the

you don't  
want to run a  
spree into the  
ground

"You see, you don't want to run a spree into the ground. That's where some of your more famous people in our line of work have messed up. I mean cops are dumb, but eventually even a blind squirrel will find a nut. So don't let your ego get the best of you. The only thing becoming famous means is that you fucked up.

"The thing to do is when you feel a spree has run long enough--that's just something you kind of get a feel for--you go and find some street bum schizo

and take him to work with you. Show him in as much detail as he can handle what it is you do, then let him do it. After that--split. The cops will find this guy easy. They'll be so damn happy to have caught somebody with blood on his hands they don't even think to consider whether or not the poor bastard is capable of running a spree or not."

"I love it! Oh man, that, I swear, is genius. Absolute genius. You are the true master, I must tell you."

"Boy, you better stop. You gonna have my head swelled the size of a fuckin' hot air balloon." The Surgeon and Marauder laughed together like two old friends talking about good times, reminiscing. "Besides," the Surgeon said, "you ain't so bad yourself. I been readin' about you, and I'll tell ya, you do some pretty impressive work."

The Marauder gasped. "Oh wow, I cannot tell you how much that means to me, coming from you. I honestly never imagined someone of your caliber would care for my

work. Admittedly, I'm a little . . . flamboyant."

"No, not really. Just a bit messy. But hey, that's your style. Me, I'm very exact, in to precision, you know. Not that one style is better or worse than the other. It's just a matter of personal expression."

"Right, right that's how I feel," the Marauder said. "Each individual has to create based on his own feelings and perceptions."

The Surgeon nodded his head in agreement. "Exactly. I've developed my style based on the experiences of my life. I've become very surgical minded, so to speak."

"Really? Did your parents try forcing you to become a doctor or something?"

"Oh no. See I wanted to be a doctor. My parents hated the

**I'VE BECOME VERY  
SURGICAL MINDED,  
SO TO SPEAK.**



idea. They were fairly ignorant people you see, and my father, he couldn't abide the thought that I might be more successful in life than he was. Any time I was caught reading or doing something he considered intelligent I got the shit kicked out of me."

"Parents are such awful creatures," the Marauder said, shaking his head in disgust.

"You're telling me. Anyhow, I started studying in secret. I did autopsies on cats and dogs and squirrels, anything really. Until my Pop caught me doing one on a little girl from down the road. He damn near killed me himself, but decided he could just get rid of me legally by calling the cops. I felt that to be the day I became a man. I knew what I would do for the rest of my days, and I went into the house and began my career with Mom and Dad."

"Oh wow, you killed your parents?"

"Of course. Didn't you?" the Surgeon asked.

"No. As much as I hated them and truly, truly wanted to brutally end their lives, I just couldn't bring myself to do it. They had beat this idea of respecting authority into me everyday of my life since I was a kid. And, well, I wanted to kill them, but it just seemed too disrespectful."

"Well, I guess that's just part of what shaped you."

"I don't know," the Marauder mused. "At some point I must have overcome my problem with authority because I'd have no trouble whatsoever in killing a cop."

"Well now a cop ain't authority," the Surgeon explained. "A cop is someone just like you and me, except his life experiences caused him to feel the need to be justified, *under the law*, in expressing his art."

"Huh. God, you know that makes sense."

"Course it does."

The Marauder started to speak again, but his words were cut off as he broke into a choked cough. The

Surgeon looked at him, and smiling, stubbed out his cigar.

"Thanks," the Marauder said, and forced another cough to clear his throat.

"Anyway, they ain't awful bright . . . generally speaking of course."

"Who?"

"Cops."

"Oh yeah."

**ANYWAY, THEY AIN'T  
AWFUL BRIGHT . . .  
GENERALLY SPEAKING  
OF COURSE**

"You know what might be fun," the Surgeon said, "that is if your one who gets off on fucking with the cops."

"Oh hell yes. Count me in. What's the play?"

"We could switch sprees."

"I don't get you."

The now familiar rat toothed smile began to make another out of place appearance on the face of the Surgeon. "We change, you know. See, you been working the highways as a hitchhiker. I've been doing my work in the area of break-ins. So let's switch. I hitchhike, you break-in. We swap work areas, but . . . we continue to work in our own styles."

"Oh I get you," the Marauder said.

"Oh God, that is brilliant. The goddamn cops will lose their minds completely."

"You like that?"

"Absolutely! It's sort of *Strangers on a Train* with a twist."

The two men drove on through the darkness of U.S. 263, the impending gag bolstering their spirits. After a time, a distant illumination interrupted the nothingness of the night. A sign ahead came into view; a large wooden board with hand painted letters and lit by seven flashlights strapped to a two-by-four at its base. It read:

BENNY'S ONLY  
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GAS & FOOD

The old green pick-up truck turned in, and ground to a halt in the gravel lot. A crumbling stucco shack sat in front of them trying hard to pass itself off as a building. The two men walked inside, an odd pair to say the least. They walked passed three rows of shelves filled with canned food products, bags of assorted chips, and warm beer bottles to a counter in the back of the store. Behind the counter sat an elderly man, a fly crawling across his bald head, looking at a magazine, the words "Spank Me" emblazoned across the cover in hot, red letters, a nude blonde beneath was bent over the hood of a sports car. Behind the man stood an old fashioned



soda cooler.

"Pardon me, sir," the Marauder said.

The old man sat quietly.

"Need a couple of cokes, buddy," the Surgeon said.

"Got money for 'em, have at it," the old man said without looking up from his reading.

The Surgeon dropped a dollar on the counter, walked around, got two sodas from the cooler, came back and handed one to the Marauder along with the keys to the truck.

"You're giving me your truck?"

Hell, it ain't much of a truck. Besides, we might as well go on and put our little plan into action."

For several minutes the Marauder stood silent.

"Well," he finally said, "it's been an honor."

"For me as well."

"I'll run out to the truck and get your tools from the glove box."

"Naw," the Night Surgeon said, stopping him. "You keep those. I can get some new ones."

The Marauder had no words. He simply turned and walked out the door drinking his soda. The truck's engine barked as it started, gravel rained from its tires, and the Roadside Marauder was gone.

The dust was still settling on the parking lot when the Night Surgeon made his phone call to the Harden County Sheriff's Office to report a rusted green truck stolen. It wasn't something he wanted to do; goddamn, he hated doing it. But there was the problem of Allen Brickman. Mister Brickman was a man whose wife had been killed sometime around two years ago by the Death Hunter (god, what a name) of Houston, Texas. Apparently, Mister Brickman had seen the man who committed this horrible crime, unbeknownst to the Death Hunter, and not more than three hours before the Night Surgeon had picked up the Roadside Marauder, Mister Allen Brickman spotted the man who'd killed his beloved wife outside a shopping mall in Opelika, Alabama.

The Death Hunter, a.k.a. the Night Surgeon, wanted to take the time to find out what in the holy hell Mister Brickman was doing in Opelika. But he didn't. Mister Brickman was rolling around in a plastic sack in the back of a green pick-up truck heading northeast on U.S. 263.

*Sorry kid*, the Surgeon thought as he sat on the curb outside Benny's to drink his soda, a tear creeping from his eye. *I lost my temper with the guy. When you lose your temper at work, you get caught. I had to do something.*

"Rock and a hard place," he said, voicing his frustration. "Nothing else I could do."

The sound of sirens echoed for a time, up and down U.S. 263, interrupted only occasionally by several rolling cracks of gun fire. Soon, though, sirens died, and nothingness swept in quickly to swallow U.S. 263 again.

# Sorry kid



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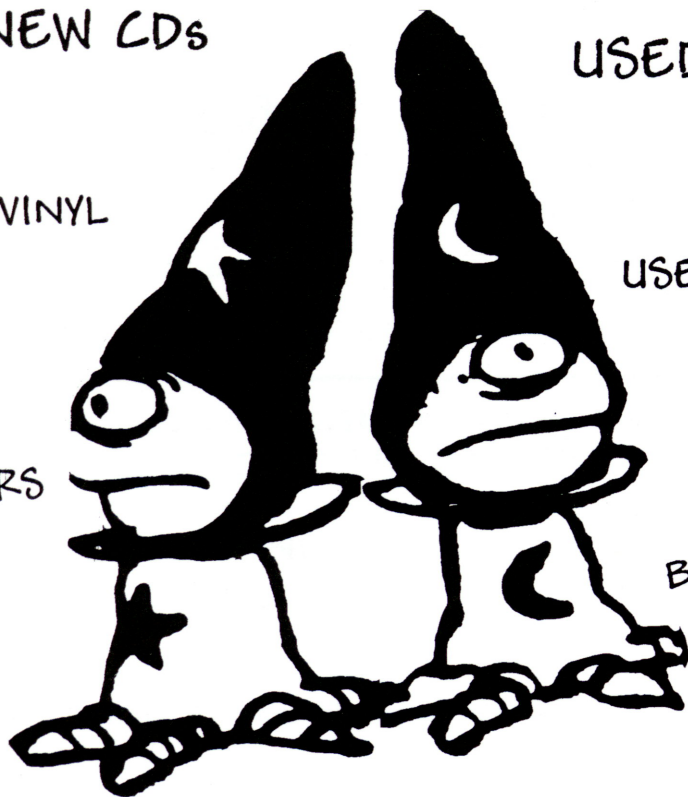
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